

AMENDMENT TO THE CLAIMS

Replace the claims with the following rewritten listing:

1. – 11. (Withdrawn)

12. (Original) A process for forming a pattern of an earplug, the process comprising:

providing an earplug;

orienting the earplug relative to a printing device; and

printing the pattern on the earplug using the printing device.

13. (Original) The process of claim 12, wherein the printing device comprises an ink jet printer.

14. (Original) The process of claim 12, wherein the printing device comprises a non-impact printing device which is located remote from the earplug when the pattern is formed on the earplug surface.

15. (Previously Presented) The process of claim 12, wherein the printing device comprises an impact printing device which intimately contacts the earplug surface during said printing.

16. (Original) The process of claim 15, wherein the printing device is one of a PAD printing device and a heat transfer printing device.

17. (Previously Presented) The process of claim 13, wherein the ink jet printing device forms a dot matrix pattern.

18. (Original) The process of claim 12, wherein the pattern includes one or more colors arranged according to a predetermined pattern.

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19. (Original) The process of claim 12, wherein the pattern comprises at least one of a custom logo or printed text.

20. (Previously Presented) The process of claim 12, wherein the printing device comprises a plurality of printing devices orientated relative to one another so that a plurality of patterns are formed on the earplug.

21. (Currently Amended) A process for forming a pattern of an earplug, the process comprising:

providing an earplug;

orienting the earplug relative to a printing device; and

printing the pattern on the earplug using the printing device;

The process of claim 20, wherein the printing device comprises a plurality of printing devices orientated relative to one another so that a plurality of patterns are formed on the earplug; and

wherein the plurality of printing devices are orientated one of 120°, 180°, and 90° relative to one another.

22. (Original) The process of claim 12, wherein the earplug is oriented by an alignment device, the alignment device positioning the earplug within or near the printing device.

23. (Original) The process of claim 22, wherein the alignment device selectively positions the earplug in a plurality of orientations during the printing process.

24. (Original) The process of claim 12, wherein the printing device applies a pattern to the earplug from a plurality of positions.

25. (Currently Amended) A process for forming a pattern of an earplug, the process comprising:

providing an earplug;

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orienting the earplug relative to a printing device; and
printing the pattern on the earplug using the printing device;
~~The process of claim 12,~~ wherein the printing device includes at least one nozzle;
and
wherein the nozzle applies a pattern to the earplug from a plurality of orientations.

26. (Currently Amended) A process for forming a pattern of an earplug, the process comprising:

providing an earplug;
orienting the earplug relative to a printing device; and
printing the pattern on the earplug using the printing device;
wherein the printing device includes at least one nozzle where the nozzle applies a
pattern to the earplug from a plurality of orientations; and

~~The process of claim 25,~~ wherein the nozzle is associated with a microprocessor and computer unit such that the nozzle selectively applies a pattern to the earplug from a plurality of orientations.

27. (Previously Presented) A process for forming a pattern on an earplug, comprising:

providing the earplug;
transferring the earplug to a printing device;
orienting the earplug, with an orientation mechanism, relative to the printing device;
communicating the pattern from a storage device to the printing device, said communicating being performed by a controller;
printing the pattern, with the printing device, on an outer surface of the earplug;
and
conveying the earplug away from the printing device.

28. (Currently Amended) A process for forming a pattern on an earplug, comprising:
providing the earplug;

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transferring the earplug to a printing device;
orienting the earplug, with an orientation mechanism, relative to the printing device;
communicating the pattern from a storage device to the printing device, said communicating being performed by a controller;
printing the pattern, with the printing device, on an outer surface of the earplug;
conveying the earplug away from the printing device; and
~~The process of claim 27, further comprising~~ orienting the printing device, with the controller, relative the earplug.

29. (Previously Presented) The process of claim 27, wherein the storage device comprises a microprocessor and wherein said communicating comprises the microprocessor transmitting a signal corresponding to the pattern to the controller and the controller controlling the printing device so as to produce the pattern.

30. (Previously Presented) The process of claim 27, wherein said printing comprises:
supplying ink under pressure to a nozzle;
ejecting the ink from the nozzle in the form of ink droplets; and
deflecting the ink droplets onto the outer surface of the earplug.

31. (Previously Presented) The process of claim 30, wherein said ejecting comprises vibrating the nozzle to form the ink droplets.

32. (Previously Presented) The process of claim 30, wherein said deflecting comprises transmitting the ink droplets past a charge electrode, applying an electric charge to the droplets at the charge electrode, and transmitting the ink droplets through an electric field formed by deflecting electrodes, the ink droplets deflecting in the electric field based upon the electric charge.

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33. (Previously Presented) The process of claim 27, wherein said printing comprises an impact printing of the pattern on the outer surface of the earplug.

34. (Previously Presented) The process of claim 27, wherein said printing comprises a non-impact printing of the pattern on the outer surface of the earplug.

35. (Previously Presented) The process of claim 27, wherein the outer surface of the earplug comprises a side portion and an end portion, the end portion being formed substantially perpendicular to the side portion, said printing comprising applying the pattern to the side portion of the outer surface or to the end portion of the outer surface.

36. (Previously Presented) The process of claim 27, wherein said printing the pattern comprises forming a text letter, a number, or a graphical design on the outer surface.

37. (Previously Presented) The process of claim 27, wherein the printing device comprises a plurality of individual printing devices each for printing the pattern at a different location on the outer surface of the earplug.

38. (Previously Presented) A process for forming a pattern on an outer surface of an earplug, the outer surface including two opposing end surfaces and a side surface extending therebetween, comprising:

printing a first pattern on the side surface; and
printing a second pattern on one of the opposing end surfaces.

39. (Previously Presented) The process of claim 38, wherein said printing the first pattern comprises a first printing device applying the pattern to the side surface and wherein said printing the second pattern comprises a second printing device applying the second pattern to the end surface.

40. (New) The process of claim 25, wherein said plurality of orientations are attained by maneuvering the at least one nozzle relative to the earplug.

41. (New) The process of claim 25, wherein said plurality of orientations are attained by maneuvering the earplug relative to the at least one nozzle.

42. (New) The process of claim 26, wherein said plurality of orientations are attained by maneuvering the at least one nozzle relative to the earplug.

43. (New) The process of claim 26, wherein said plurality of orientations are attained by maneuvering the earplug relative to the at least one nozzle.

44. (New) The process of claim 27, wherein said orienting the earplug comprises rotating the earplug relative to the printing device.

45. (New) The process of claim 27, wherein said plurality of orientations are attained by maneuvering the at least one nozzle relative to the earplug.

46. (New) The process of claim 27, wherein said plurality of orientations are attained by maneuvering the earplug relative to the at least one nozzle.